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HEADLINE: FOR TRAVELERS, THE BREATHING IS EASIEST IN FIRST CLASS

BODY:

Where is purest seating aboard a modern jetliner?

According to a 1986 National Research Council study, the air in one section comes close to alpine. Unfortunately for travelers, it's in the cockpit, where delivery of fresh air is at least 10 times higher than that supplied the passenger cabin. That, noted the study, is to assure crew alertness and instrument efficiency.

For travelers, the cleanest atmosphere is in first class. There are fewer people and fewer smokers in an area with more room per passenger. A draft of clean air whispers from the cockpit. Thus, first-class air in smoking and nonsmoking sections is often times cleaner than in business or coach.

What of rear cabin travelers?

"With ventilation being from nose to tail, the first few rows of nonsmoking in coach are my choice," said Mickey Cohen of San Diego, director of maintenance for PSA. "In the back of the airplane, in addition to the smoke, it tends to get colder because you're near the (ventilation) outflow valve."

But that, noted Robert Rosner, executive director of the Smoking Policy Institute of the University of Seattle, only applies to one-class travel. When there are first, business and coach classes, the initial rows of nonsmoking in business or coach are immediately behind smoking sections.

"So I always try to sit in the first third of nonsmoking in business or coach, around Rows 10 to 12 presuming Rows 1 to 25 are nonsmoking," he said.

SUBJECT:

SMOKING; AIRLINES -- UNITED STATES; HEALTH HAZARDS; AIRLINE PASSENGERS

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